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Joan Cook becomes president of the General Assembly

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
Free Christian Churches, 2001*

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Cover GA President Joan Cook with her husband Stan and children Hannah and Adam. Photo by Molly Ramsay

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Inquiring Words

U will find friendship and fellowship

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I n this house.

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A nd you can express your thoughts freely.

R est peacefully

I n the quietness for a while

A nd when you are refreshed

N uture the peace you have found

*— Acrostic by Bernice Lashbrook
Bridgwater Unitarian Chapel*

Martin West is honoured at the GA

At the General Assembly meetings, *The Inquirer's* board surprised long-time Finance Director Martin West with three things bearing his name – a well-wishing card, a customised cover of *The Inquirer* and a bottle of Rémy Martin brandy. Martin retired from his post late last year and is greatly missed. This was a chance to thank him.

Martin handled the accounts beautifully and helped the paper develop a business plan which continues to be a great resource. He was a tireless fund raiser for *The Inquirer* helping it to succeed in its mission to be a vehicle of both 'inreach' and outreach for the Unitarian movement. (Photo right, Board Chair John Midgley presents Martin West with his commemorative cover.)



Inquirer reception marked changes

By Jane Tomlin

There was a good attendance at the *Inquirer* reception which this year had a slightly more formal tone. John Midgley, chair of the board, introduced each of the directors present: Diane Bennett, Angela Maher, Phil Tomlin and Stephanie Bisby, (Rev Eric Jones had sent apologies) who each spoke briefly about their occupations and why they serve on the Board. There had been some changes during the previous year with Martin West having retired as Finance Director and the arrival, in December, of Steve Bisby as administrator.

Free copies of the latest *Inquirer* were distributed – a colour edition with Derek McAuley on the front and a double page of readers' letters as well as the news from Upper Pocklington. Whilst enjoying the wine, some facts about the finance of the paper were shared. There is a considerable gap between the direct costs of producing the paper and the income from subs and advertising revenue. This gap is largely met by the generosity of the District Associations, Trust Funds and individuals who add the extra £5 to their £35. Some Congregations make donations too, and the GA gives a Support Grant of £3000. Thanks, with applause went to our main advertiser, David Edwards Insurance.

We urgently need at least two more Board Members, who meet three times a year at Essex Hall. Please think about it.

Colleen Burns, editor, thanked everyone for buying the *Inquirer* and looked forward to another successful year with, we hope, at least another 100 new readers!

Jane Tomlin is interim finance officer of The Inquirer.

Joan Cook: steady presence in a crisis

These are the remarks with which Ann Sinclair, member of the Edinburgh congregation, seconded the nomination for Joan Cook to be elected president of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

Often on these occasions we normally hear reminiscences of growing up in Unitarian Sunday schools, May queens, youth groups – but not for Joan. She is one of those of us who came across the Unitarians – or perhaps the Unitarians found her.

Joan was brought up as an Episcopalian. As she grew older she had trouble accepting the doctrine, so stopped going to church. When she started to attend meetings of the local Amnesty International group, she entered the portals of St Mark's Church – and so she found the Unitarians. When the time came, she and Stan were married in St Mark's.

Joan trained as a nurse. I've heard tell of the usual wild escapades of youth, but can't embarrass her because I can't remember the details.

She registered in general and psychiatric nursing and became a ward sister at Edinburgh's psychiatric hospital. But as family responsibilities came, she decided she would prefer to focus on the prevention of ill health, so she undertook training to qualify as a health visitor. In her work she focused on maternal and infant mental health and was also area lead for dementia.

I have never known Joan to be fazed by a practical situation. In an emergency, she is there. At St Mark's, if we have water pouring into the building during heavy rain, Joan is there finding all the mops and buckets. Or if someone is suddenly ill or has an accident, she is there offering help, suggesting appropriate action – and quietly follows up afterwards.

As we approached the retirement of our minister of many years standing, Joan worked to become a celebrant for weddings and other rites of passage. She has subsequently completed the advanced level of the Worship Studies Course and become an official lay preacher.

Joan stood for election to the Executive Committee in 2008, served the full four-year term, stood for election again and served another full term of four years.

Scotland can seem a long way away – but please remember it is as far to travel south as it is for southerners to come north! Through her work as EC link to several districts and through leading services for a number of congregations, Joan has already visited many parts of our Unitarian domain. Joan will be the seventh President to come from Scotland over the past 40 years or so and the third-woman President to come from St Mark's.

It's been a privilege for me to work alongside Joan and to see her develop in her various roles.

Our movement can be proud of the opportunities it offers to its members and of the people nurtured by it.



Joan Cook fastens the vice president's medal of office on the Rev Celia Cartwright. Photo by Molly Ramsay

Remarks delivered by Joan Cook on assuming the presidency.

I feel very proud, and honoured to have been elected to the Presidency of our General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

Thank you, to my family, to Stan for being the most involved non-Unitarian, for lifts to train stations, airports and chapels on the top of Welsh hills; also for his fixing of barriers, emptying of leaking water tanks, and choosing of Christmas wines!

To Hannah and Adam too. Hannah, who has taken part in many of June Bell's Christmas Productions, and Adam, who for some time helped with our Fair Trade stall.

From their early years both Hannah and Adam had to put up with disrupted mealtimes, because I had a meeting to go to.

So much part of their lives, that when called to an early supper, they would sigh '*Not the Leaky Roofs Committee again!*'

I am indebted to those with whom I have worked with on the General Assembly's Executive Committee, the SUA Executive, the future ministry panel and various other projects, from whom I learned so much. I am grateful to the tutors and those involved with the Worship Studies courses, from which I gained a great deal, and of course, the members of my home Church, St. Mark's, who encouraged me, and gave me the opportunities to become involved at congregational, district, then national level. I am grateful especially the Rev Andrew Hill, who suggested I should take services, and learn to take Rites of Passage ceremonies.

During this coming year, I should like to visit as many of our congregations as I can, especially the smaller and more isolated congregations, those who because of size or geographical location may feel themselves distanced from the centre of Unitarianism in the UK, hopefully reinforcing the bonds and ties between all our member congregations, as well as our governing body.

Having benefitted from the encouragement of others, in this, my year as President of our General Assembly, I should like to focus on encouraging others encouraging others to take on roles, at local, district, and national levels.

We have heard many stories of volunteering over the past few days, and I know there probably there are probably very few people here who don't already contribute to our movement, as a volunteer, in some way, already.

So rather than asking everyone here to take on more, I think we should be putting our efforts into *actively* seeking out, encouraging and supporting *new* volunteers from within our congregations. And yes, I know, that takes far more effort than just getting on and doing it yourself, but it is a far more sustainable approach.

So to go back to the beginning, the road to here, started many years ago, when I was collecting my daughter after the children's activities one Sunday, someone sidled up to me, and suggested I might just like to become involved with the children's programme, and it all just went from there.

Lay ministers: engage all senses in worship

By Sheena McKinnon

Our session at the GA meeting was titled 'Not just a hymn sandwich' and in it, we explored five different things that could be used in worship – but not all at the same time, of course.

To keep things simple and memorable, we looked at the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell.

Considering sight, we talked about the 'candles of joy and concern', sometimes called 'candles of sharing' or 'candles of love'. Many congregations already do this either occasionally or regularly. It involves having a number of tea lights arranged safely at the front of your space and then everyone is invited to come and light a candle and share something with the congregation if they wish, or to simply have a moment of silence. We discussed the role of the worship leader in being sensitive to the needs of those who could not easily get to the front to light their candle and to offer to light one on their behalf. Also, at least one church has electric candles, especially for the children – what a good idea.

Moving on to the sense of hearing, we noted that music is a very important part of our worship and we are blessed in having so many talented musicians and singers. But what we considered in this session was silence. Having periods of silence is important. It allows time for self-reflection and prayer. This time could come at the end of a spoken prayer and be ended with something like a chime or simply a spoken 'Amen'. We could not agree on the optimum time to allow for silence: it varies widely from one place to another.

Touch was covered by a 'communion of friendship', where each person would shake the hand of the person on each side

of them. A couple of people shared that at their own chapels they actually hugged each other. Speaking personally, I would not like that, and for some people even shaking hands is not ideal. This was the most contentious of the topics we covered.

Taste. We considered the 'jellybean communion'. This is where jellybeans are given out and we are asked to first enjoy the sight and smell of the jellybean, before moving on to taste it. We give time to consider all the people who have been involved in bringing it to us. It's a great addition to a harvest service in that we take time to be grateful for all the work that others do so that we can enjoy foods from around the world. Other foods can be used – in Bradford we have used dates and olives, which are wholesome and natural, and they come from the land where Jesus lived and taught: Be aware of allergies and know what is in the food you use.

Finally, smell. My suggestion was that perhaps someone could be designated to pop out at a convenient moment near the end of the service and set the coffee machine going. In Scarborough, someone puts the oven on so that by the end of the service we are all treated to a delicious savoury aroma. Anything like this that can encourage people to stay and get to know each other has to be a good thing.

This session covered only five simple things and was a taster of our conference, where we will cover many more ways to enrich our worship. This takes place 23-25 November at the Nightingale Centre, and you can email me for more information: sheenagayle@gmail.com

Sheena McKinnon is a member of the Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry.



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LED BY REVS JOHN HARLEY, LINDY LATHAM AND PAUL HOLDSWORTH



Ann Peart calls for more female honorees

The Rev Dr Ann Peart, long-time Unitarian minister and formerly principal at Unitarian College Manchester, was awarded honorary membership in the Unitarian General Assembly – one of the movement's highest honours. These are her acceptance remarks:

Thank you for bestowing this honour.

Thank you to the Scottish Unitarian Association and Joan for proposing it, and thanks to all who supported, encouraged, challenged and provoked me into my Unitarian life.

I am of course delighted to become an honorary member of the General Assembly, but I'm very aware of others, particularly ministerial colleagues, who are equally deserving, but not yet so honoured. Of the seven current honorary members, only one, Dawn Buckle, is a woman, so I am glad to double the female representation. I think I am the first out-lesbian to be included.

The British and Irish Young Adult Network (BUYAN) presentation on the first night reminded me of my early days at the General Assembly meetings in the early 60s, when the Foy Society was composed of 18-35 year olds. We slept on church hall floors, never paid any conference fees, but stirred things up with the 62 group, and asked the same sorts of questions and showed similar concerns that BUYAN does. But there was at least one significant difference. On Wednesday I was really impressed by the confidence of the young women. Way back in the 1960s, both the Foy Society at times and the GA meetings generally were dominated by men's voices. There



*Ann Peart accepts her honorary membership.
Photo by John Hewerdine*

was no time limit on speeches, so it often seemed very tedious. As a young woman, I would never have dared to try to speak at a GA plenary session. It was not until the early '80s that a small group of women, having experienced the consciousness-raising activities of second-wave feminism, encouraged and helped each other to contribute to the debates.

Our movement still needs the insights of those who struggle on the margins as we are to meet new challenges. I realise that I have been in danger of becoming an establishment figure, but only this autumn, at the Unitarian Theology Conference, I

found myself once again on the margins and in trouble again when I realised that although our language may sound more inclusive, much of our history and current theological thought is still dominated by male experience. We still need to pay attention to the wide variety of experience in our midst and in the world, and we cannot rest on our laurels. It is some years since we did a gender audit in our movement, I suspect that there is a considerable gender gap in the pay of our headquarters staff, for example.

At one time I assumed that to be made an honorary member was all about marking service in the past, making one a has-been and perhaps a part of history rather than the future. But I look forward to perhaps a few more years of prodding our movement into change, helping to keep it relevant – a caring, compassionate community, but not complacent or cosy.

The Rev Dr Ann Peart is a retired Unitarian minister.

For Alan Ruston the GA is his 'community'

Honorary membership of the GA. What Alan Ruston said in response

Alan Ruston was given honorary membership of the Unitarian General Assembly. These are his remarks on receiving the recognition.

Thanks for the recognition of the input I've made to the Unitarian movement since the early 1960s.

I'm not of course a born Unitarian. My first involvement came in December 1960, when I attended an evening service at Newington Green. It was very much outside my experience, as I'd not been brought up to go to church. It was an elderly congregation even then and there were fewer than 20 present. After going to further services, I found it suited me and was what I was looking for – I then was not yet 20. Within six months I was on the church committee and in August 1961 took my first service. It all developed from there.

In 1967 I was elected to the GA Council. Twenty-one people put up for the 14 places available for lay people – contested elections then – and I was elected, coming (and I was not supposed to know this) seventh in the number of votes cast by congregations and ministers. Peter Hewis has wittily described some of the interesting, to say the least, times we had in that decade when we looked so impossibly young to what you see today.

My first GA meetings were in April 1962, held at the South Place Ethical Society in Bloomsbury, in central London. I've been to all but five ever since, though a few old friends will have been to more. I recollect others who have received this honour in the past. Dr Stanley Kennett was one who was a significant figure at these meetings and never missed the GA gathering. He will be recalled by some here today as a dominant personality from Liverpool, with firm views, thin and tall and a real master of the rules of procedure. It was he who first organised the steering committee. After saying thank you he added something like: 'If you think by this device you're going to shut me up, you're wrong.' It didn't – he carried on just as he always had done, reminding us when he thought we had gone wrong.'

What has kept me actively involved within our Unitarian fold? I think that has best been described by the speaker at the John Relly Beard Lecture at the start of these meetings – it is community and the sense of community. All those people I've met and reacted to over the years are *my* community to whom I relate. I belong with you here today, and it's the sense of this unique community that has encouraged and sustained me within Unitarianism for all these years. Thank you again.

Alan Ruston is a member of the Watford Unitarian Fellowship.

Women's pockets emptier than men's

By Jo O'Sullivan

The Unitarian Women's Group (UWG) at the General Assembly focused on 'Empty Pockets', with a successful resolution and a talk provided by Roxanne Mashari, a board member of the Women's Budget Group (WBG). These both highlighted the UWG's deep concern that the negative effects of the government's austerity measures have fallen disproportionately on women.

The General Assembly voted overwhelmingly (with no votes against) to support a resolution calling on Unitarians to learn of the effects of austerity on women and to fight for an end to the policies which have created suffering.

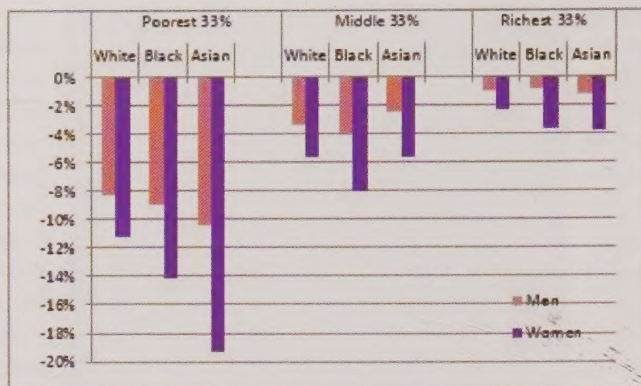
The effects on women were brought into sharp focus by the brilliant Roxanne Mashari, in her talk. She spoke about the Group's work to analyse successive budgets and policies for their impact on women and men and their effect on gender equality. Budgets and policies are not gender neutral. She contends these policies systematically undermine gender economic equality and independence for women.

The graph above shows the cumulative individual impact of changes in taxes and benefits (percentage of net individual income per annum by 2020) by household income groups, gender and ethnicity.

The main reasons that women feel the spending cuts so keenly is because they are the main recipients of welfare benefits and services. They also make up two-thirds of the state workforce. The cutbacks affect them directly.

The Equality Act and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which try to ensure that gender equality is given 'due regard', are being ignored. We wondered if a test case could be brought under the Equality Act.

The Women and Equalities Select Committee at Parliament



has asked the Treasury to provide a civil servant or accountant to give evidence on this subject. Shockingly, to date, the Treasury has ignored this request.

So, what can individuals do? Roxanne suggested:

1. Contact your local MP to point out the WBG's work, then praise good work and point out the deficient.
2. Contact those controlling local authority spending and see

how their budgets can best be used to help women. 'Follow the money' – see where it's spent and challenge inequity. In particular, look at Local Enterprise Partnerships.

3. Provide female-orientated products to food banks e.g. toiletries and sanitary products.
4. Set up a local women's network to help.
5. Stand for local election to put gender on the agenda.

After the talk and questions from the group, Roxanne said, 'I often feel that no one hears my message but being with all of you today has made me feel that I am not alone.'

A further guide to things that can be done, the motion and background paper are found on the Unitarian Women's Group website: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/womensgroup/wgpockets.htm

The Unitarian Women's group welcome all women to come to 'Empty Pockets' Unitarian Women's Group Conference, 19-21 October at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow. Led by, Sue MacFarlane, Kate Dean and Jo O'Sullivan. Booking: Stella Burney info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk or ring 01298 871218. For more info: Margaret Robinson margaretrobinson81@gmail.com or ring 01642 782219.

Jo O'Sullivan is a member of the UWG.

IARF learns of government meddling in faith

By Jim Corrigan

Every government in Europe regulates religion in some way, but there are big differences in how this is done, according to the Rev Dr Paul Rasor, an expert in religious freedom, in a talk GA Meetings, organised by the British chapter of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF).

Dr Rasor outlined three ways faiths in Europe are regulated:

1. State funding for religion, whether through direct grants or tax concessions.
2. Directing how religion is taught in state schools.
3. Regulation of religious symbols in public places.

In a recent study, the speaker focused on six European states: Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Italy, Poland and the UK. These states varied greatly in character: from those with a state religion or church (like Denmark and the UK), to those where there is separation of state and religion, as in France. Civil societies vary too, from high rates of religious observance (Poland) to being largely secular (Czech Republic).

The states of Europe are in turn regulated by the European Convention on Human Rights, which includes clauses on

religious freedom. Key principles here are that states should not show favouritism to one faith over another, and should allow autonomy for the different groups.

However, paradoxically, another Convention principle, known as 'the margin of appreciation', asserts that individual countries and their courts have rights over their own situations. This has allowed the European Court of Human Rights to support widespread public displays of Christian symbols in Poland (crucifixes and crosses), on the grounds these are cultural, while also upholding the right of the French state to outlaw religious symbols in public places, including crosses and crucifixes (these particularly in schools).

Dr Rasor suggested these apparent contradictions were in fact a reflection of the complexity of church-state relations in Europe, which had had a long and often violent history. And he did have a word of caution about Brexit: even when Britain leaves the European Union, it will still be subject to the European Convention on Human Rights. So that won't be changing, whatever else does!

The Rev Jim Corrigan is a minister in Lancashire.



The Unitarian Earth Spirit Network offered a workshop on rituals which can be used in worship. One group, on left, pauses to recall their earliest memories of the natural world. Janet Lythgoe, right, holds a feather to represent 'air' in the opening ritual. Photos by Molly Ramsay

Social action: Do something and do it well

By Valerie Walker

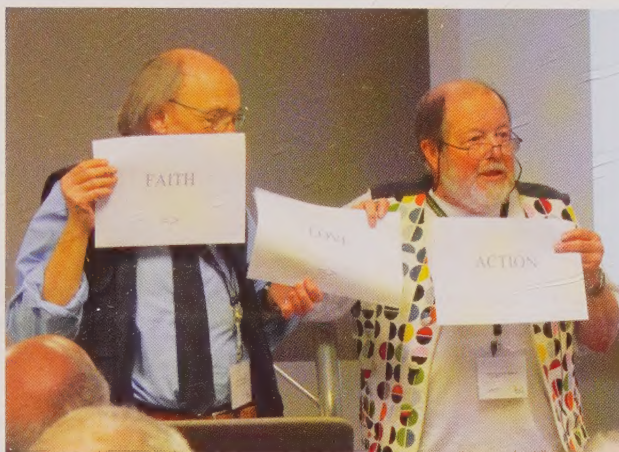
The real Unitarian 'outreach' group – the National Unitarian Fellowship – held one of the first meetings at the Assembly. Those present were mainly members of congregations and societies, the nature of the NUF being such that membership is aimed at those who are unable, or unwilling, to attend conventional centres of worship so few attend the General Assembly Meetings.

Reaching out to these, our like-minded but scattered friends, via the quarterly newsletter and *Viewpoint* journal as well as online is the aim of the Fellowship, although happily there are also groups which are able to meet in groups.

Outgoing President Joan Wilkinson's welcome gave a brief outline of the previous year, committee changes, remembrance of those members deceased, and also told those present of the Small Groups Weekend* to be held at The Nightingale Centre from 26-28 October. She introduced Howard Wilkins as the new President and Janet Lythgoe as secretary and also said that Ken Smith was to become treasurer and would be combining the position with that of membership secretary (a new and practical arrangement).

Our minister, the Rev Tony McNeile thanked Joan for her years of commitment to NUF. Since the 1990s she has organised and encouraged the work of Fellowship groups as well as NUF literature and online, acting tirelessly as secretary and latterly as president. She continues now as editor of *Viewpoint*. Also a founding member of UKUnitarianTV she is still active with their northern team.

Our invited speaker, the Rev Ernest Baker, retired minister of Underbank Chapel, Stannington, was introduced. Ern and I have been friends since student days – 1961, my first year as a Unitarian (when there was even a University of London Unitarian Society!), and I knew to expect an intellectually researched but accessible discourse.



Cliff Reed (left) and Ernest Baker illustrate faith into action. Photo by Molly Ramsay

'Unitarians and Social Responsibility', with the more down-to-earth sub-title 'y r u bovver'd wiv that' (very Ern, that).

As the long-serving secretary of the Send a Child to Hucklow charity, Ern has for many years been involved in the administration of sending groups of children from disadvantaged backgrounds for holidays to The Nightingale Centre (he hopes that you and your congregation, support this charity).

He felt that being a Unitarian implied a commitment to social responsibility, that this secretarial task, often very demanding of his time and energy when he was a minister as well as now in his retirement was a 'no brainer'.

So the 'why bother' question.

Referring to Christian scripture, including the original Greek, and to the reflections of theologians and philosophers, our speaker explored the motivations behind the reasons and feelings on 'why' so many of us take on voluntary responsibilities. Is it an altruistic desire to do good works, or are we displaying selfless conviction when really we may just be seen as 'worthy'? How often is the motivation 'what is in it for me?'

These questions seems to me to need a longer session and wider discussion, not something that I can successfully or accurately précis here. To repeat one of the quotes: 'We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realising that. This enables us to do something and to do it very well' (Oscar Romero). Old friend Ern, you have stirred up this listener's thoughts!

* If interested in the weekend or in joining the NUF, see www.nufonline.org.uk or contact Joan Wilkinson, Small Groups organiser, joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk

Valerie Walker is a member of the NUF.

Unitarian Gener



Assembly 2018



Last year prostate cancer, onto sepsis

By Lis Dyson-Jones

Gathering on the second day of the Annual Meetings, the Rev Celia Cartwright opened the Women's League AGM with words of hope and lit the chalice before all stood in remembrance of members who had died or suffered serious illness during the past year.

There is always a tinge of sorrow when apologies are received from those unable to attend, but hearts are lifted as greetings from so many are given. This year there were several, and warm greetings from Northern Ireland were especially heartening with cheers of congratulations with the news announced that they had raised £5,000 for Muscular Dystrophy UK in 2017.

Expressions of gratitude were made to the Rev Jean Bradley for her work over several years towards the India Fund and to Eunice Smith, in her absence and for many years of dedication as League project treasurer.

The business meeting continued with the unanimous acceptance of previous minutes, the presentation of accounts and an excellent secretary's report from Susan Wildman. The latter, reported that the Triennial Conference in 2017, held at Luther King House, Manchester, in October was well attended and serious issues concerning the League were honestly discussed.

The importance of looking ahead with a vision on future needs of members and of providing for the needs of potential new members was high on the agenda. A visit to the Elizabeth Gaskell House Museum fed our Unitarian appetite and a 'witch drive' provided lighter moments. A contribution of £100 was sent to the Red Cross following the conference.

All national and branch Officers were thanked and special praise was given to Joy Foster for editing the colourful League Letter, to her husband Tony, for his assistance in its production, and to Anne Jones for her regular devotional contributions. Special mention was given to the Rev Celia Midgley as the League link to the Women's Group. Thanks were given to the Rev Celia Cartwright for her services as president and congratulations were offered on her new role as GA vice-president elect.

All branches were commended for the hard work in raising £9,400 for Prostate Cancer Research, the 2017 League project, and Eddie Kirk of the Prostate Cancer Trust was visibly moved as he accepted a cheque from The Rev Celia Cartwright. In expressing his gratitude on behalf of the Trust, he stressed the need for greater awareness of this serious male condition and was delighted that the amount raised would make a considerable contribution towards funding continued research.

As she entered the final stages of her Women's League Presidency, Celia expressed the honour she felt to have been able to represent a Unitarian group of women all working to uphold the spirit of goodwill and fellowship. She spoke movingly about her year in office and the feeling of universal warmth from all the members she had met on her travels. It was this welcome and friendship which helped during her grief following the loss of her mother at the start of her presidency in April 2017, and the support from League officers, was sincerely acknowledged.

Celia related a meeting she had attended with the GA Executive Committee with other League Officers when they were asked to describe the vision of the Women's League. She then fully realised how important it was for the voice of the



Celia Cartwright, former president of the Women's League presents a cheque for £9,400 to Eddie Kirk of the Prostate Cancer Trust. Photo by Molly Ramsay

League to be heard and at a time when numbers were becoming fewer, not to fear change but to present a challenge for the rights of women in the 21st century. It was important to remove the myths about women, refusing to be patronised or ignored. *The Women's League has since its beginning been a group who stood up for 'rights' and in this year commemorating 100 years since the end of WW1 it must be remembered that the Women's League supported the progression of all women. Work will continue everywhere that women are repressed and ill treated. Women have left the kitchen and we all have a role to play in encouraging them to join our ranks. The vision is that we must all respect our differences, building on the values of the past and moving from the things now obsolete to create better opportunities for all women working towards a better future.*

The retiring President spoke encouraging words to Anne Gemmell, a member of Dean Row Chapel, offering her the best wishes of all members as she passed on the chain of office, inducting her in the role of 2018 Women's League President. Anne then spoke briefly about her pleasure and honour in accepting the office and of her passion about the League. She then introduced John McCarthy of the UK Sepsis Trust, the charity chosen as the next Women's League project.

A sepsis survivor, John spoke eloquently about the seriousness of sepsis as he described his own story of survival following serious illness, which resulted in partial amputation of his right leg. A potentially life threatening condition, sepsis affects more than 250,000 each year in the UK. It is triggered by infection and each year kills 44,000 in this country. It can be successfully treated if diagnosed early and speed is vital. The work of the UK Sepsis Trust involves education and awareness-raising and campaigning to encourage the Health Secretary to fund full media coverage of sepsis. Fund raising plays an important part in training more medical professionals to recognise early symptoms. In expressing his thanks, John ended by saying the gratitude to groups like ours can never be overstated and encouraged everyone to find more information at: www.sepsistrust.org

In closing the meeting, Anne Gemmell asked for prayers to help her fulfil the role of Women's League President to the best of her ability.

Lis Dyson-Jones is secretary of the South East Wales District Women's League.

Using social media to aid growth

By Nina Caddick

What do an Englishman, a Welshman, and a Scot have in common? Well, this might sound like the start of a joke but at The Hibbert Trust session at the GA Annual Meetings, this was clearly not the case. All three were very eloquent in talking about the various ways of using technology and social media to enhance chapel life.

After a brief introduction about The Hibbert Trust from Helen Mason, a trustee, we were taken through the pros and cons of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. The approximately 40 attendees were then treated to real life examples of success stories, such as Gellionnen, where the congregation has doubled after using Facebook to publicise services and events. It was also used to connect with the community and interact with the curious, wondering about Unitarianism.

People like people, it turns out. Using technology tools to analyse what works and what doesn't, Gellionnen members found that photos of people are particularly popular. So are photos of the interiors of chapels and events. Gellionnen had 8,200 views of photos, 6,300 of a graveyard tidy-up and 5,600 of a new year's service. Their advice? Keep updating your posts often to keep people checking out the site. And, keep them short and snappy. They have performed more weddings in two years than in the last 20, and the chapel is now positive with optimism for the future.

We were then taken through the benefits of Google Docs

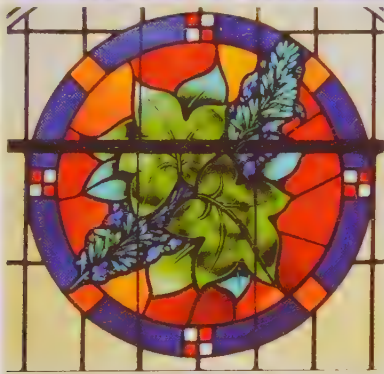
as used by St Mark's Chapel, Edinburgh. This enables the controller/user to grant access to a variety of people and to police documents, if they are changed without permission. Google Docs is an excellent way of managing bookings as several people can have access to one diary.

Finally, the question on everyone's lips relates to cost. One of the student ministers helped us out here. Who knew you could 'boost' Facebook and pay for selective advertising? At 30p per click, do you consider this effective? You can invite people to a 'gathering', at a cost of £58 – an invitation which could reach over six million. There are other ways of increasing exposure, and congregations could explore them according to their budgets. A few suggestions were made from the floor such as 'search engine optimisation'. Mill Hill Chapel also suggested that both Microsoft and Google offer grants to churches if they apply.

However, with GDPR (General Data Protection Rules) coming in we all need to be aware of security of data. Please be sure to check this out too.

Technology is the future, whether we like it or not. If we want to attract new members and increase numbers we need to embrace it. Look up UKUnitarians on Facebook if you can. Joke? Now who will have the last laugh?

Nina Caddick is Secretary to the Hibbert Trust, which promotes public interest and personal scholarship in contemporary issues in liberal religion. For more information on the trust, see www.thehibberttrust.org.uk



Ministerial Opportunity First Presbyterian Church, Belfast *a church community at the heart of the City*

First Presbyterian (Non-subscribing) Church, Belfast is the city's oldest place of worship. Its congregation was established in 1644 and it has played an active and varied role in civic life. First Church is proud of its heritage and the liberal Christian tradition to which it belongs – which includes links to Unitarianism. It is a community that values diversity, intellectual enquiry and engagement with the world. And we are a congregation united by open-minded faith and friendship – a place where tradition is respected and renewed and ideas matter.

We wish to appoint a **full-time Minister** to lead our congregation in this next, and

important, phase of its development. It's an exciting role at a time of transition for First Church and the wider Belfast community. We are looking for someone **who shares (and will uphold) the values of our congregation** and who can help to secure its future. We expect that our new Minister will have **well-developed pastoral and communication skills** and that s/he will have **demonstrable, and broadly-based, experience** in areas relevant to the work and witness of First Church and the needs of its people.

In appointing a new Minister, we want someone who will: **nurture and develop** our congregation; **encourage and facilitate** its relationship with the denominational traditions to which we are affiliated and belong; **harness the talents and diversity** of church members; and **extend our role and voice** in city life – **making connections** with other faith traditions and communities and **exploring the relationship** between religion, society and the world of ideas. And we want someone who is **as passionate about the benefits and continued relevance of a liberal faith as we are...**

We invite applications from suitably qualified candidates (who will have a **primary degree and a qualification in Theology and pastoral care as a minimum**) and who have **at least 5 yrs' experience in a congregational, or equivalent, setting** to have included **dealing effectively with organisational and people issues and external relationships**.

This position will attract a salary of **£25,200 as a full-time minimum**, subject to review based on skills and experience. We expect to purchase a **Church-owned manse** for the post-holder, or to make a monthly allowance for the costs, based on agreed denominational arrangements.

Further details about this opportunity and its requirements (including how to apply) are available from: Dr Pamela Topping, Hon Secretary, First Presbyterian (Non-subscribing) Church, Belfast secretary@firstchurchbelfast.org

The closing date for completed applications is 22 June, 2018.

Letters to the Editor

Booing in GA debate was inappropriate

To the Editor:

Good reports of this year's Annual Meetings have reached us; however, one occurrence marred the event, as far as we were concerned. We have heard a delegate was booed whilst contributing to the debate on motion 7, which concerned equality.

At Bury Unitarian Church, we usually devote a specific session to discussing the year's GA motions, in order to agree with our delegates how they should vote, and that was the case, this year. It was felt that motion 7, with its references to austerity, was political, and somewhat contrary to our Unitarian ethos. Our delegate offered to present this view to the meetings.

We cannot be certain what exactly provoked the booing, but it definitely happened. Traditionally, I understand, the audience's disagreement with the speaker results in applause being withheld. Total agreement on every single point raised cannot, realistically, be expected. Nevertheless, our liberal, tolerant faith should prepare us to accept opinions different from our own, without resorting to unacceptable behaviour.

I feel that our delegate was insulted – and, by implication, this extends to the congregation which was represented. That reception may well have inhibited others from speaking, too.

I sincerely hope that, in the future, there will not be a repetition of the behaviour which occurred this year, and that those who indulged in it will, by now, have considered their attitude and regretted it. We continue to support our delegate and feel proud of the way in which our congregation was represented.

Anne Mills

Chairman of the Congregation
Bury Unitarian Church

WL seeks photos of previous presidents

To the readers of *The Inquirer*:

I wonder if you might be able to help. The Central Committee of the National Unitarian Women's League is collecting together photographs of past Presidents of the Unitarian Women's League, which was formed in 1908, and are being collated by Mrs Mary

Wightman to be placed in an album designed for the purpose.

In many cases we have the name of a president only, no details of their whereabouts, and no means of securing a photograph. We would be grateful for any help you can give us, whether it is a contact or, better still, a photograph. We would be thrilled to have any details you can provide. We can follow up any links you can give us.

Mrs Bernard Allen (1919)

Mrs Currer Briggs (1922)

Miss Ruth Nettlefold (1927)

Mrs Willmer (1932)

Mrs A A Taylor (1934)

Mrs E Lewis Lilley. J.P. (1936)

Mrs M Severs (1944)

Mrs H Bailly D.Sc. (1946)

Mrs A D Mitchell B.A. (1951)

Miss Margaret Stevenson (1959)

Mrs I Matheson (1965)

Mrs A Fraser (1968)

If you can provide a photograph, please contact Mrs Mary Wightman: 38 Sunart Street, Broughton Ferry, DD5 3HW. For all other queries please write to: The Rev Penny Johnson, Flat 2 Kennerley Court, Kennerleys Lane, Wilmslow SK9 5EQ

Telephone 01625 404174 (leave a message if I am not available) or email me at: kenneth.johnson1@btinternet.com.

Thank you for your help

Penny Johnson
Wilmslow

Church of Scotland is very different from CofE

To the Editor:

Forgive me for being a nit-picky Scot, but I must challenge John Midgley's comment that the 'Episcopal Church is Scottish for the CofE' (*Inquirer* 7937, page 8).

It's true that the Scottish Episcopal Church has bishops and is part of the Anglican Communion. But there the resemblance ends. In terms of history, it arose out of the Scottish reformation, so it is not, and never has been, an offshoot of the CofE. It doesn't have an archbishop, and is not in any way connected to the state.

More recently, the church changed its rules to allow its clergy to celebrate same-sex marriages. And it does not debar people who are in same-sex marriages from being ordained. For

the record, the 'established' church in Scotland is the Church of Scotland, which is Presbyterian, but even the CofS is not bound up with the UK's political structures as the CofE is.

Andrew Bethune
Cambridgeshire

Reaching beyond 'grudging tolerance' takes respect

To the Editor:

Thank you to Dorothy Haughton (Letter, *Inquirer*, 10 March) for making me think further about my short article, 'Time to end grudging tolerance' (*Inquirer*, 10 February). Dorothy states that sometimes all many of us can muster is grudging tolerance. Certainly, there are some worldviews and beliefs that we can only just tolerate, and some which we should outright condemn. What I am advocating, and probably should have made more clear in my original article, is respect for the human persons behind the beliefs and views. If we respect the person, recognising them to be vulnerable and flawed human beings like ourselves, and the product of their context and conditioning, we are more likely to be able to enter into relationship, where we might learn something of their context and gain greater insight into why they hold the beliefs or views that they do.

From this relationship there is the possibility that real dialogue may emerge, if the other person is similarly willing to treat us with respect. If mutual respect cannot be established this will probably not be a fruitful endeavour and we will have to walk away, maybe just about managing to tolerate the other person. However if our aspiration is to try to begin encounters with respect, hoping that this might be reciprocated, we have more chance that, sometimes, we will enter into real dialogue; and maybe even be changed ourselves.

This is not an easy path, and I am very often guilty of avoiding engagement, because it is hard work. But maybe if we have an aspiration to engage respectfully, we will sometimes succeed in moving towards real and transformative dialogue.

Maud Robinson
Penzance

Renewal group anticipates GA centenary

By David Dawson

The Unitarian Renewal Group (URG) does not normally 'do' history, or indeed prophecy; but tends to build its activities around current issues. URG does, however, recognise the value of historical awareness when it shows how we have changed and developed over time, and how that pattern might indicate a way forward. And so the 90th anniversary of the formation of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches in 1928 became the basis for the URG session at the Annual Meetings.

To stimulate discussion a timeline had been created for the period 1928-2018, this was available as a large-scale colour display (20ft x 2ft) together with a small-scale version (two sides of A4) for individual perusal. The timeline tried to show the progression in different aspects of Unitarian thought and activity over the 90 years – in worship, in publications, in organisations and administration, in spiritual expression, and in statistics. Many of these overlap, with the colour coding trying to keep the categories clear.

What do you show on a timeline? There are some, possibly many, things that most people would agree on: under worship, the arrival of a new hymn book (*Hymns for Living*, 1985), the use of more contemporary readings and longer periods of silence (1970s, 1980s). Under publications, most people would wish to acknowledge the early work from the Worship Sub-committee: *Reflections*, *Echoes*, *Celebration* and the publication of *Building Your Own Theology* (1990). Under administration – the introduction of the GA Quota (1989) and the major change of governance (EC in 2006). Statistics are not so easy to establish, with much estimation and the use of varying criteria, but the detailed survey by the Foy Society in 1965-66 (14,220 adult members, 238 congregations) is certainly worthy of a place on the timeline.

Having got the generally agreed major features in place there will inevitably be debate about what else is considered important. It was, I suspect, this subjective aspect of the timeline that drew a larger than normal audience to the URG meeting, with many people contributing worthy suggestions and with their individual specialist knowledge adding detail and precision to some of the topics. If you read the Unitarian Historical Society *Transactions* you will find many articles on the 18th- and 19th-century topics with precise dates, yet we struggle to date more recent events: when did we first use the Chalice? When did the young people's league officially cease to exist and the Youth Programme start? When was the first Worship Studies course? Someone, somewhere knows the answers to these questions – but it's not yet recorded history!

The detail on the timeline stopped with the publication of *Sing Your Faith* in 2009. It is the intention of URG to take this forward to 2018 and with perhaps a little trepidation consider what might happen in the 10 years leading up to the centenary of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches in 2028. This updating and looking forward will take place at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, on the weekend of 26-28 October when, with three other Unitarian groups: Earth Spirit, Peace Fellowship and the National Unitarian Fellowship we will present an interactive programme under the heading *Endings and Beginnings*. This weekend is open to everyone – contact Joan Wilkinson for more details (01332 814055 Email: joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk). I can send a copy of the A4 version of the timeline to anyone who would like it. (Email: dcdawson3@hotmail.com)

David Dawson is a member of the Unitarian Renewal Group.

Psychical society looks to the Universe

By Katie Hall

At the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies presentation, voices and chatter in the room came from a younger interest in John Pickering's presentation. With only a short, 40-minute slot for a large topic and a 10-minute technical hitch, on starter's orders we were off, on a magical mystery flight into our place in the immensity and mystery of the cosmos.

John questioned 'Where do we fit in' in terms of faith, and in the wider perspective of our beautiful but small and troubled blue planet whizzing around our solar system; a speck of dust in a multitude of stars.

We looked at the problem of the big bang theory: how some ask us to believe that 'something came out of nothing'. Existence is a problem neither science nor religion can adequately answer. Divine intervention or pure chance? It was awesome to see as John's presentation panned out into the universe, recording other galaxies, worlds looking similar to ours with suns and moons flying through their courses, multi-trillions of them, more than grains of sand on Earth's beaches.

It occurred to me that believing in a purposeful existence, of life, humanity and consciousness would be a more intelligent 'Leap of Faith' than thinking something came out of nothing by pure chance.

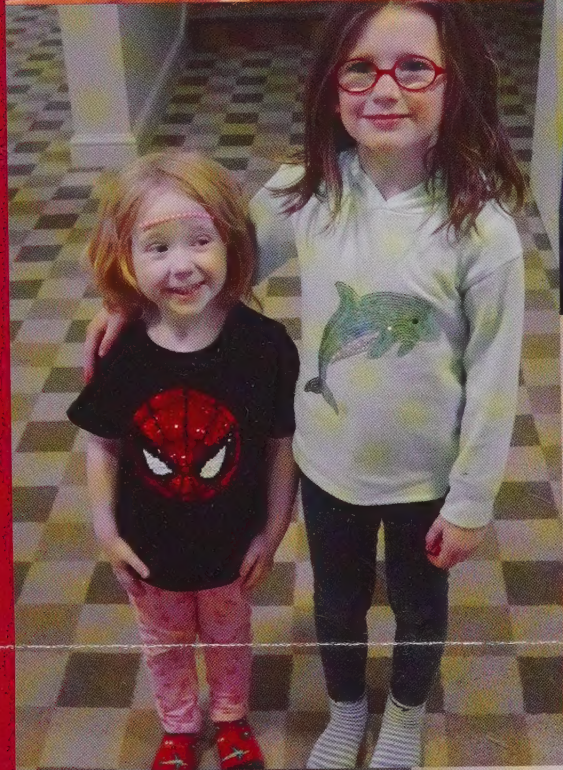
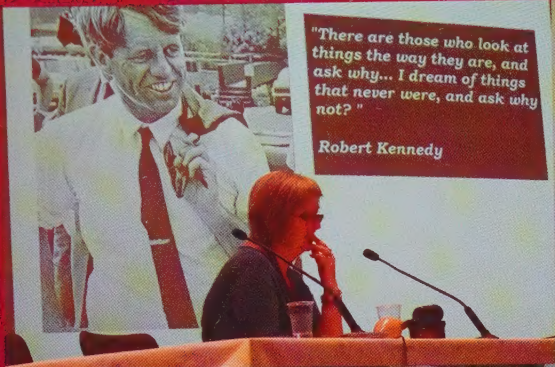
John then looked at The great image from King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the book of Daniel, written over 2,500 years ago, which, we now know, in spite of liberal theological claims to the contrary, was written by an eyewitness in Babylon. This image symbolised – from the head of gold, the chest of silver, the hips of bronze and legs of iron – the thousands of years of greed and power-based wrong thinking and decision making that led to the feet, a mixture of iron and clay, where we find ourselves today: a broken world in crisis, ecologically, socially and spiritually. On our small blue world the vast majority of our planet's resources and peoples are not thriving.

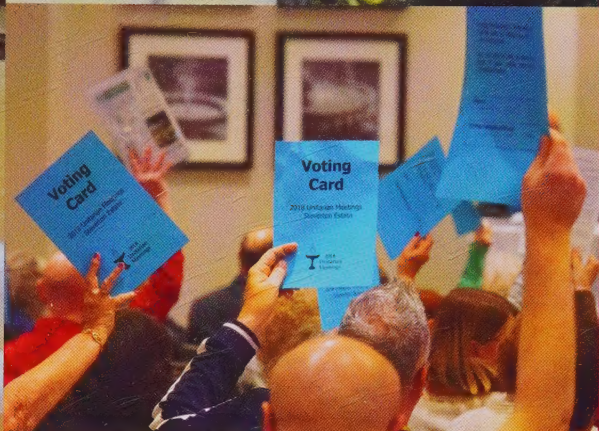
John pointed out that the Unitarian concept of oneness, of the connectedness of all life is more relevant to our survival than ever before. To have a viable future we must change – drastically at every level.

Divine change thinking, Nature change thinking, Human change thinking!

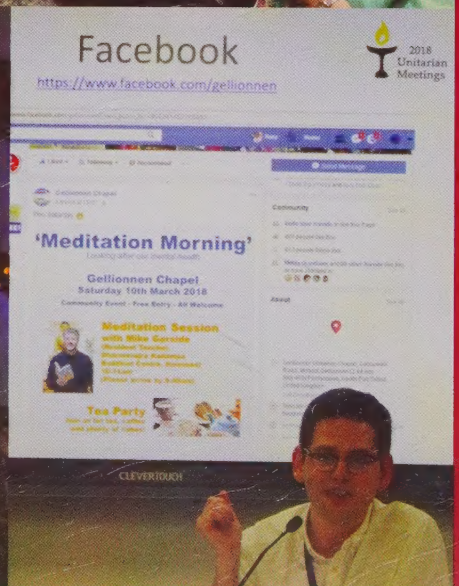
Can we as Unitarians move forward to effect real change? John felt as Unitarians we are standing at the tipping point. Are we ready to take on the challenges of the future?

Katie Hall is a member of the USPS.





Unitarian General Assembly 2018



Photos by Molly Ramsay, John Hewerdine and Daniel Costley

Stop 'fake news' by confronting it

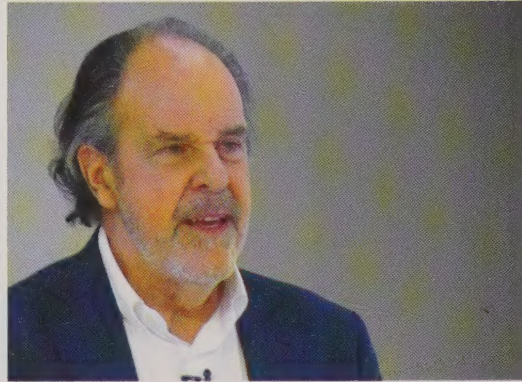
By Bruce Chilton

John Lloyd gave the presentation at the Unitarian Penal and Social Affairs Panel. John is an eminent journalist and the winner of press awards that include Journalist of the Year, Specialist Writer of the Year and the David Watt Prize. He is a co-founder of the Reuters Institute for Journalism at Oxford University and is a regular columnist for the *Financial Times* and *La Repubblica* of Rome.

His childhood ambition to become a cub reporter began with stories for the editor of the *East Fife Observer*, in east Scotland, known locally as the 'Two Minute Silence'. He got a scoop about the important local fishing industry and took it to the editor, who promptly rejected it! The editor explained to the young John Lloyd that, as true as the story was, it could not appear in the *East Fife Observer* without dividing the local fishing community. The role of the local newspaper was to present news, assist democracy and help communities find answers to problems – an important lesson for the budding journalist.

Journalism is troubled by the different conditions in democratic and 'controlled' states. John gave what he described as 'a rough background of modern journalism'. Journalism in China is 'by licence of the state' and in Egypt and much of Africa firmly controlled. Italy is a democratic state but the former president owns and controls the three major television broadcasters and newspapers. South Africa enjoyed freedom under President Mandela but slipped under President Zuma. In Hungary and Poland, governments 'squeeze' newspapers by discouraging advertising and weaken them financially. Notwithstanding big corporate ownership of newspapers, in many western democratic states like the UK journalism is relatively free.

'Fake news' has existed for a long time but it is strange that it has taken hold in the USA, which has led the world in free journalism for more than a century. Trying to get facts right was the gift of the USA. Equally strange is that the USA has



John Lloyd photo by Molly Ramsay

produced Donald Trump, who accused newspapers of using fake news to damage his presidential election chances. In fact, most fake news in the election campaign was directed at Hillary Clinton and often written in faraway places such as Georgia, south of Russia. It is not clear if fake news was a major factor in Clinton's loss but the use of fake news by Trump's side has become a model for the powerful in authoritarian states across the world.

As in religion, the roles of reason and emotion for ordinary people, newspaper readers, are of great interest. John Lloyd's Reuters Institute at Oxford University in cooperation with Leeds University studied the responses of 20 focus groups to the long-running news of the competition between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton for nomination as the Democratic party candidate in the 2008 US presidential election. And yet throughout the study, not one person referred to the nomination but seemed only to see it as a competition directly for the presidency. It seems we take in only part of the news as important and give a great deal of our time to non-scientific, unproven information – so letting in fake news.

What can we do about fake news? We can expose it!

The best free journalism tries to give us a series of proven facts leading to a reasoned conclusion. But fake news always plays on unreality. It asks why is evidence better than feelings?

In journalism across the world, the balance is now tipping in favour of fake news. The democratic British society still operates with more rationality and is fortunate to have the BBC leading the way for evidential news. The other way is a major danger!

Thanks to UKUnitarianTV, you can now see John Lloyd's address, 'Fake News – A PAP Presentation' on www.ukunitarian.tv or on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/LTa0A6oI0gE>

Bruce Chilton is a member of the Penal and Social Affairs Panel of the Unitarian General Assembly.

A view from the General Assembly podium



Photo by John Hewerdine